The Health Workforce Scholarship Programme Stakeholder Consultation: Australian College of Mental Health
Background Information
The recently released report by the National Mental Health Commission on Mental Health Services and Programs notes that over a lifetime nearly half the Australian population will experience mental illness at some point, equating to nearly 7.3 million Australians between the ages of 18 to 85, yet less than half will access treatment. The 2007 National Survey of Mental Health & Wellbeing identified that 20% (3.2 million) had experienced a common mental disorder (anxiety, depression, substance use disorders) in the previous 12 months (ABS 2008). A recent review estimated that 2–3% of Australians (600,000 people) have severe disorders, as judged by diagnosis, intensity and duration of symptoms, and degree of disability (DoHA 2013). Another 4–6% of the population (around 1 million people) have a moderate disorder and a further 9–12% (approximately 2 million people) a mild disorder (DoHA 2013). It is estimated that 9000 premature deaths occur each year among people with a severe mental illness, leading to a life expectancy average of 20 years less that the general population. Suicide is the leading cause of death among people between 15 and 44 years and is more likely among men, ATSI people, and people living outside the major cities (NMHC 2015, p5).

Mental and behavioural disorders such as depression, anxiety and drug use, are important drivers of disability. Mental illnesses are the leading cause of non-fatal disease burden and account for about 13 per cent of Australia’s total burden of disease (NMHC 2015 p6) (after cancers and cardiovascular disease (Begg et al. 2007)). I.e. of the non-fatal disease burden (i.e. years of healthy life lost through illness and disease) in Australia, 24% were lost through the effects of mental illness. Anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders accounted for almost three-quarters of this burden. In 2013, 31.2% of people in receipt of the Disability Support Pension had a primary medical condition of ‘psychological/psychiatric’ (DSS 2014).

The economic cost of mental ill-health to Australia is enormous. Estimates range up to $28.6 billion a year in direct and indirect costs, with lost productivity and job turnover costing a further $12 billion a year - collectively $40 billion a year, or more than two per cent of GDP. The OECD estimates that the average overall cost of mental health to developed countries is about four per cent of GDP (including intangible costs such as the costs of reduced wellbeing, emotional distress, pain and other forms of suffering). In Australia, this would equate to more than $60 billion or about $4,000 a year for each person who lodges a tax return (NMHC 2015, p6).

The significance of these direct and indirect costs means that mental ill-health not only affects individuals and their families and other support people, but also the standard of living of every Australian and our communities more broadly (NMHC 2015).

Mental health nursing
Mental health nursing is a specialised field of nursing which focuses on working with people with mental illness and mental disorder to meet their recovery goals, considering the person’s physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs, within the context of the person’s lived experience and in partnership with their family, significant others and the broader community.

Mental health nurses support mental health consumers and their families during life crises and transition periods. They liaise discretely and effectively with a range of health care providers, provide information and education on mental health maintenance and restoration, and coordinate care and provide evidence-informed therapy. Mental health nurses work across the full range of clinical and service settings, and across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas – they play a significant role in the health care system and have the qualifications, skills and experience to provide high quality mental health nursing care in all contexts – primary, secondary and tertiary settings.

The mental health nursing workforce needs to be flexible and responsive and able to work with people across the life span, and in a variety of work place settings.

The document Health Workforce 2025 – Doctors, Nurses and Midwives (HW2025) provides the first, long-term, national workforce projections for doctors, nurses and midwives. Workforce supply, demand, training, retention, exit rates and geographic distribution of the professions were considered. Mental health nursing and aged care nursing were identified as experiencing existing and predicted future workforce shortages of significant magnitude and indicative of a service provision crisis.
Responding to demand and addressing workforce shortages

Developing and sustaining a specialist mental health nursing workforce is an important strategy to improve access and equity for people with mental health problems. The Australian College of Mental Health Nursing (ACMHN) is Australia’s peak professional body for mental health nurses and its objective has always been to set and achieve national standards in high quality mental health nursing care.

The ACMHN has established two key processes designed to strengthen the mental health nursing profession, by supporting standards and quality:

1. **The ACMHN Credential for Practice Program (CPP)** is a professional self-regulation initiative for mental health nurses in operation since 2004. The ACMHN Credential is the only nationally consistent standard for recognition of specialist mental health nurses. Completion of a specialist post-graduate mental health nursing/psychiatric nursing qualification is one criterion to be met for the award of a mental health nursing Credential, and applicants must demonstrate ongoing commitment to professional education, professional development and recency of practice.

2. The development of mental health nursing practice begins at undergraduate level, and requires a clear articulation through Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Masters level programs.

The Mental health Nursing Education Taskforce (MHNET) was established in September 2005 as a sub-committee of the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council’s (AHMAC) Mental Health Standing Committee (MHSC) and the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia and New Zealand) (CDNM). The purpose of the Taskforce was to provide expert technical advice and recommendations on the development of national policy and strategic directions for mental health nurse education, consistent with the National Mental health Plan 2003-2008, and implement three recommendations of the Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee (AHWAC) (2003), Australian Mental health Nurse Supply, Recruitment and Retention Report, namely to develop an agreed framework for mental health content in undergraduate general/comprehensive nursing degrees, to ensure consumer and carer involvement in course development and delivery for undergraduate nursing and postgraduate mental health nursing courses within universities, and to consider a range of innovations for mental health education that create a nursing workforce better prepared for mental health practice (MHNET, 2008). The MHNET Report established a framework for the mental health component of pre-registration nursing degrees, but did not address postgraduate education for mental health nurses.

A Scan of Postgraduate Mental health Nursing Programs in Australia 2011 (ACMHN) identified the high level of divergence and inconsistency between courses, particularly in how the education component interacts with clinical competency. As a consequence, nurses who have identified that they want to become a specialist mental health nurse face difficulty in choosing a course that provides appropriate mental health nursing skills. The Scan of Postgraduate Mental health Nursing Programs in Australia 2011 (ACMHN) found ‘there was considerable variation in relation to expectations about specialist and advance nursing practice. Both graduate certificate and graduate diplomas programs were variously described as preparing nurses for roles such as: beginning practitioners in mental health; advanced practitioners in mental health; speciality practitioners at an introductory level; or proficient practitioners.’

To ensure national consistency in the preparation of mental health nurses, the ACMHN developed a **National Framework for Postgraduate Mental health Nursing Education** - based on agreed criteria, supporting values and principles - and a subsequent accreditation process, that builds on the MHNET framework and enables clear articulation from undergraduate to postgraduate level study, as well as a clear educational career path for mental health nurses. The course accreditation process has been piloted and will be launched in October 2015, enabling educational providers of postgraduate mental health nursing programs to submit their program for scrutiny and will provide the mechanism by which it can be established that specialist mental health nurses are consistently receiving postgraduate educational preparation that meets the needs of consumers, the standards of the profession and the demands of professional practice. The Framework and accreditation process is attracting significant attention from the university sector and several programs have already been identified as preparing an application process.
In addition to the above, the ACMHN is currently developing a comprehensive response to the workforce shortages existing and projected for mental health nursing. This response will necessarily include:

- Scoping the existing workforce. The 2012 National Health Workforce Dataset shows that employed nurses (both registered and enrolled nurses) who indicated they were working principally in mental health comprised about 1 in 16 (6.6% or an estimated 19,048) nurses employed in Australia (290,144). It is unclear how many of those nurses hold a qualification in mental health nursing /mental health. As education and training impact on retention and quality outcomes, this is an important body of knowledge to establish.
- Working with ANMAC to determine the current status of mental health content and clinical placements being provided in undergraduate nursing programs.
- Undertaking a survey through the NMBA around the mental health literacy of nurses and midwives, then responding to the identified areas of need
- Supporting a professional and educational pathway for generalist nurses to transition into mental health nursing
- Supporting the professional development of nurses currently working in mental health clinical settings, many of whom do not have specialist mental health nursing qualifications
- Establishing standards and a framework for enrolled nursing programs in mental health, with a view to articulating through to registered nursing and mental health nursing specialty
- Supporting the development of other measures that improve retention, manage demand and boost productivity, which are likely to be the most timely and cost effective means of managing the significant projected nursing workforce shortages (HWA, p3). For example, clinical supervision has been associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, improved retention, reduced turnover and staff effectiveness. Effective clinical supervision may increase employees’ perceptions of organisational support and improve their commitment to an organisation’s vision and goals. Importantly, clinical supervision has been linked to good clinical governance, by helping to support quality improvement, managing risks, and by increasing accountability (Care Quality Commission, 2013, p6).

ACMHN Recommendations around Scholarships

Without ongoing investment and support around mental health (nursing) development, workforce shortages are likely to become critical and one of the most vulnerable groups in the Australian population will be denied access to quality mental health nursing care. Education, professional development and clinical placements are essential components of efforts to sustain and build the mental health nursing workforce, to cope with the current and projected demand of mental ill-health now, and into the future.

The ACMHN strongly recommends that the review of the Australian Government scholarship program addresses the range of educational needs of nurses - across undergraduate, post graduate, continuing professional development, clinical placement and re-entry - through supporting nurses and midwives to access mental health (nursing) specific content.

As requested, the ACMHN is making recommendations based on the following considerations:

- The courses that should warrant scholarships, both in terms of the profession they support and the type of support, such as undergraduate, graduate or continuing professional development
- What might be an appropriate payment amount to participants and what outcomes could be expected for that payment
- Which criteria should be taken into account when awarding scholarships.

Please see the table below for the ACMHN recommendations around Scholarships:
### Table 1: ACMHN Recommendations: Scholarship programs for the Australian Government

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<th>Type of support &amp; eligible programs</th>
<th>Award Criteria</th>
<th>Payment and expected outcomes</th>
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| Undergraduate: Master of Nursing (Mental Health) or Grad Dip of Nursing (Mental Health) (pre-registration) | Applications will be considered from applicants who are:  
  - Australian citizens or permanent residents.  
  - Enrolled or intending to enroll in an accredited nursing course that results in a nationally recognised entry level nursing qualification.  
These are competitive scholarships and will be assessed using a selection weighting which will be applied to the following criteria:  
  - Previous qualifications  
  - Employment in the health sector (mental health)  
  - Financial need. Scholarships are not means tested but applicants who can demonstrate a lower income level than others will receive more points. | Scholarship recipients will receive $5,000 per semester for full time study or $2,500 for part time study up to a maximum scholarship value of $30,000.  
The level of funding provided is determined by the period of study required. Maximum funding for the double degree will be $40,000.  
Funding is only available for courses studied in Australia. These scholarships are not bonded. |
| Postgraduate: Available to undertake graduate certificate, graduate diploma or masters programs in mental health, including nurse practitioner courses with a focus on mental health. Additional Eligible Program criteria could include:  
  - Accredited against the National Framework for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education  
  - Must meet qualification criteria for Credentialing as a Mental Health Nurse (i.e. AQF Level 8 (Grad Dip) or Level 9 (Masters)) | Applications will be considered from applicants who are:  
  - Australian citizens or permanent residents.  
  - Registered nurses or midwives with current registration.  
  - Delivering clinical mental health services in Australia.  
  - Delivering clinical health services in Australia and identifying practice goals to move into the specialty of mental health.  
For the purposes of this scholarship, delivering clinical services involves direct client contact providing treatment, intervention or assistance, assessment, client management and education across the health care system.  
  - Enrolled or intending to enroll in a postgraduate nursing course at an Australian university or registered training organisation. Courses must be provided by an Australian university or registered training organisation. The course selected must provide the student with greater skills and knowledge in a field of direct relevance to mental health nursing. PhD programs or masters by research are not eligible programs.  
These are competitive scholarships and will be awarded on the recommendation of a selection committee whose assessment will be based on how applicants address the following questions:  
How will your course benefit:  
  a. your nursing practice  
  b. your longer term goals  
  c. those for whom you care within your area of practice?  
  
Describe your commitment to your area of practice.  
Applicants must: | Scholarship recipients will receive $7,500 per semester for full time study or $3,750 for part time study up to a maximum scholarship value of $30,000.  
The level of funding provided is determined by the period of study required. These funds are intended to assist successful recipients in meeting the cost of their chosen postgraduate course.  
Funding is only available for courses studied in Australia. These scholarships are not bonded. |
1. hold a nursing degree or equivalent qualification, and
2. be registered nurses, and
3. hold a current practising certificate

**Continuing Professional Development**

Available for conferences, short courses, workshops, seminars that have a core focus on mental health.

Applications will be considered from applicants who are:
- Australian citizens or permanent residents
- Enrolled nurses, registered nurses or midwives with current registration
- Delivering clinical services in Australia
  For the purposes of this scholarship, delivering clinical services involves direct client contact providing treatment, intervention or assistance, assessment, client management and education across the health care system.
- Participating in a short course, workshop or conference for which NMBA continuing professional development hours can be accrued.
  The course selected must provide the student with greater skills and knowledge in a field of direct relevance to mental health.

Postgraduate programs such as Graduate Certificates or Graduate Diplomas are not eligible.

Maximum available funding is $1,500. Funding is only available for activities conducted in Australia.

These are competitive scholarships and will be awarded on the recommendation of a selection committee whose assessment will be based on how you address the following questions:

- How will your course benefit:
  a. your nursing practice
  b. your longer term goals
  c. those for whom you care within your area of practice?

Describe your commitment to your area of practice.

**Clinical Placements:**

This scheme will support nurses, midwives and nursing or midwifery students to undertake a clinical placement within a mental health clinical setting.

To be eligible to apply you must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident and meet one of the following criteria:
- A postgraduate nursing or midwifery student undertaking a course in, or related to mental health nursing.
- An undergraduate nursing or midwifery student enrolled in an accredited nursing or midwifery course that results in an entry level nursing or midwifery qualification.
- An enrolled nurse, registered nurse or nurse practitioner working in a mental health setting, who wishes to undertake a placement in a larger or more specialised mental health service.
- An enrolled nurse, registered nurse or nurse practitioner who does not work in a mental health service but wishes to undertake a placement in a mental health service.

This scholarship can only be awarded once during a student's course of study. Current NAHSSS UG and NAHSSS PG scholarship holders are eligible to apply.

The maximum total value of the scholarship is $23,000. Payments may be made for:
- Travel
- Accommodation and living expenses only if a scholar is required to relocate from home to complete the placement
- Loss of income (not available for undergraduate students)
- Supervision payment to the hosting hospital.

**Re-entry:**

The initiative will support nurses and midwives wishing to re-enter the workforce into mental health setting.

Applications will be considered from applicants who are:
- Australian citizens or permanent residents
- An enrolled nurse, registered nurse or registered midwife whose registration has lapsed.
- Participating in an accredited re-entry course, that will lead to re-registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) within the specified time period.

Value up to $10,000

These are competitive scholarships and will be awarded on the recommendation of a selection committee whose assessment will be based on how you address the following questions:

Describe your intention to return to work once you have re-registered.

How will your course benefit your longer term goals?
Summary and Key Points:

1. Mental ill-health is a significant burden for Australia in terms of health outcome, quality of life, co-occurring illness, death and disability. It impacts on individuals, families and communities; and poses significant economic and social cost to the nation.

2. The mental health nursing workforce is well-placed to respond to mental health demand, across the full range of clinical and service settings. However, the specialty is facing significant workforce shortages, which will impact on Australian’s ability to access suitably qualified specialist mental health nursing services into the future.

3. Policy decisions taken by government, higher education, professions and employers will have a significant impact on the scale of the projected workforce shortages.

4. Developing and sustaining a specialist mental health nursing workforce is an important strategy to improve access and equity for people with mental health problems.

5. A multi-pronged approach is required to develop and sustain the mental health nursing workforce, including: scoping the mental health workforce; identifying mental health literacy of the nurses and midwives not working in mental health; providing professional development opportunities in mental health for non-mental health nurses; establishing career pathways into mental health for non-mental health nurses; ensuring mental health is adequately addressed in undergraduate comprehensive nursing courses; ensuring consistency and quality across postgraduate mental health nursing programs; focusing on retention strategies for those currently working in mental health, including through high quality professional development and clinical supervision.

6. Education, professional development and clinical placements are essential components of efforts to sustain and build the mental health nursing workforce, to cope with the current and projected demand of mental ill-health now, and into the future. Focusing Australian Government Scholarships on mental health (nursing) programs will be an important support process that will enable and encourage nurses to increase their knowledge, skills and expertise in mental health, and ultimately, improve the health care journey and clinical outcome of Australians experiencing mental health issues.

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References:
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